

In *Ancient Gospel, Brave New World*, E.D. Burns proves conclusively that, as much as culture matters for the missionary task, the unchangeable truths of the gospel matter more. Only by grasping these transcendent realities will we have anything of value to offer the lost and least-reached peoples of the globe. In a world of subjectivity and doubt—attitudes which affect modern missions—this book will renew your delight in God’s revealed Word. Put this book and its companion volume into the hands of everyone you know involved in missions.

Alex Kocman | Director of Advancement and Communications, ABWE

After reading this excellent work by E.D. Burns, we can hear the great Reformer Martin Luther say, “Justification is the doctrine upon which missions stands or falls.” When we abandon doctrine under the guise of cultural contextualization, we surrender the only truth, empowered by the Holy Spirit, that can transform hearts from the kingdom of darkness to the kingdom of light. *Ancient Gospel, Brave New World* is a clarion call to return to the sole foundation of all biblical missionary efforts—Scripture. Without doctrine—rightly understood and fervently articulated—all other ground is sinking sand.

Dustin Bengé | Associate Professor of Biblical Spirituality and Historical Theology, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY

We are not short on books about missions. We are not short on books about the gospel. We are (sadly) short on books that view the missionary enterprise through a thorough-going theological lens. Enter *Ancient Gospel, Brave New World*—clear, thorough, and unashamedly rooted in orthodox Bible doctrine. Refusing to go down the route of tailor-made pragmatism, this book charts a clear course for gospel proclamation to the nations that is both practical and biblical. This will be a book I return to regularly.

Kofi Adu-Boahen | Lead Pastor, Redeemer Bible Fellowship, Medford, OR

There is a famine of books about Jesus Christ. In *Ancient Gospel, Brave New World*, above every vital missiological insight there is the incessant drum-beat of the centrality of the risen Savior and the implications of trusting in the Lord. If I could be so bold as to speak for Thomas Boston: “The Marrow Men heartily applaud the contents of this book!” Burns clearly explains some of the most essential doctrines of our day and every era, such as faith/faithfulness, sanctification, assurance, sola fide, and the law/gospel distinction. He burns with a passion to exalt the Lord Jesus Christ. Pro tip: read the great footnotes!

Pastor Mike Abendroth | Bethlehem Bible Church, West Boylston, MA

The gospel's core message must be protected against the temptation of over-contextualization, especially when evangelizing beyond the Western world. Unfortunately, while the evangelist's intentions may be sincere, such contextualization efforts can often produce a false gospel that cannot save.

E.D. Burns tackles this widespread issue in *Ancient Gospel, Brave New World* with theological clarity and precision, proving that the biblical gospel transcends cultural boundaries. Burns also shows why the gospel must be communicated faithfully through the biblical paradigm of guilt and righteousness, as undergirded by penal substitutionary atonement and justification by faith alone. By combining biblical and systematic theology with many supporting witnesses from church history, Burns effectively undresses many of the deceptive attacks being waged against the true gospel. In the process, Burns reminds us that the power of God for salvation rests *not* on the ingenuity of man but on the faithfulness of God.

Ancient Gospel, Brave New World should be required reading for all missiologists and missionaries, not just for the sake of theology but also to provide guidance toward a missiological philosophy of ministry that is both faithful and practical.

Ekkie Tepsupornchai | Senior Pastor, Western Avenue Baptist Church,
Brawley, CA

In this timely seminal work, Dr. Burns takes us back to the core of the gospel's message—that we are saved by grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone to God's glory alone. With a clarity and conviction rarely seen today in the world of missions, Dr. Burns proves his case that evangelism can only be effective and glorifying to God when it is anchored in the sovereign moorings of the finished work of Christ. Building on this premise and with the precision of a skilled theologian, Dr. Burns debunks many of the myths plaguing modern evangelicalism's pragmatic and unbiblical approach to missions and cultural engagement. This book is a clarion call to not only missionaries and missiologists to return to the gospel's essential message of Christ alone but also to anyone involved in ministry, whether they be a pastor, elder, deacon, or teacher. Truly the work of a pastor's heart, this is Christ-centered theology as it ought to be written. No true evangelist should be without this book.

John A. Tucker, Esq. | Pastor, Community Bible Church,
Beloit, OH

Do trendy contextualization methods based on sociology hold more promise for missionary success than the core doctrines recovered at the Reformation? In *Ancient Gospel, Brave New World*, author and missionary E.D. Burns responds to popular theories on cultural orientations and calls missionary ambassadors to return to the core of the gospel. Grounded in solid theological reflection and conversant with practical missiology, Burns demonstrates how various cultural orientations such as honor/shame and fear/power all point to the problem of “enoughness,” which is answered in the biblical paradigm of guilt/righteousness that overarches all other ways of understanding man’s central problem and its solution. This book will help both missionaries and those who support them navigate the shifting seas of missionary methodology and cast their anchor on the solid rock of the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Karl Dahlfred (PhD, University of Edinburgh)
OMF International – Theological Education & Church Planting
Adjunct Professor, DMin advisor, Bangkok Bible Seminary,
Bangkok, Thailand

The field of missiology is fraught with a lack of theological and pastoral oversight, clarity, and precision. This has created space for what is known as contextualization—in many ways the result of the seeker-sensitive movement, sociology, and often well-intentioned pragmatism. In this book, E.D. Burns does something long been needed: he’s grounded missiology in the sound doctrine found in the pages of Scripture. Without compromise, Burns presents a biblical missiology without the pop sociology that has muddied the waters of missiology for too long. Burns establishes the simplicity and purity of gospel-orthodoxy first and then slays the errors and heresies that permeate many missionary approaches. This book is a must-read for churches that are thinking through how to be more missional, and any believer who is considering spending his life on the field.

Peter Sammons, PhD
Director of Academic Publications
Faculty Associate in Systematic Theology
The Master’s Seminary

Ancient Gospel, Brave New World:

***Jesus Still Saves Sinners in Cultures of
Shame, Fear, Bondage, and Weakness***

E.D. Burns

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Jesus Still Saves Sinners in Cultures of Shame, Fear, Bondage,
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Dedicated to

My mother,

who instilled in me the disciplines of
study, writing, and hard work
and has stood by me through much adversity.

*Our one and only aim and object should be to lift high the
cross and proclaim the gospel of a Savior.*

- John Sung Shang Chieh, 宋尚节

*I'm so thankful for the active obedience of Christ.
No hope without it.*

- J. Gresham Machen

*The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full
acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to
save sinners.*

- 1 Timothy 1:15

Foreword

I have often felt a timidity in asking hard questions of missionaries who are making sacrifices for the ministry of the gospel that I suspect I am unwilling to make. I am an American pastor. My calling has its challenges. But I do not carry out my ministry with the challenges of ministering in another language and culture. I do not face the economic strife, political uncertainty, or loss of family and friends faced by missionaries I support, not to mention the prospect of diseases that we have eradicated in America. I have the blessing of living in the freest and most prosperous nation in the world. This causes me to be hesitant to press on the doctrine and method of my missionaries. If I question the validity of a story or approach to missions, I am nearly certain I will be seen as a jerk. I almost want to level that charge at myself. I suspect many pastors and missions committees are like me.

Yet we must resist this temptation to leave our missionaries without accountability to the doctrine they teach and the methods they employ. God and the gospel are on the line. As those who send gospel ministers to the nations, our churches bear the responsibility to ensure our missionaries are teaching sound doctrine. We also must protect them from employing worldly methods that transform them into peddlers of the Word of God. It dishonors the people group we are reaching, the missionary, the Word of God, and the Lord of glory to do anything less.

There is a stark incongruity in the missions world today. The most important truths are on the line—truths difficult to communicate with clarity in our own language and culture, and truths that confront our culture's questions and answers. But missionaries are so often unprepared. Sadly, a degree in missiology is sometimes code for "I skipped all the hard classes in seminary."

We have turned over one of the most intellectually challenging tasks in Christian ministry to the least intellectually prepared among us. We are sending young people to the hardest work imaginable with insufficient preparation for the task before them. They are going to learn another language and culture. They are tasked with proclaiming the most glorious truths delivered to us—truths so incomprehensible regarding our holy God that we are often moved to cover our mouths rather than speak errantly.

Several operating assumptions in missiology must be challenged. First, missiology is often grounded in cultural anthropology, sociology, pragmatism, and personal experience rather than the authority of Scripture. Second, the condition of man is defined in culturally and sociologically relativistic terms rather than the unwavering and universal truths of Scripture. Third, the traditional Protestant missions effort is being challenged as a foreign imperialistic work based on a bastardized gospel message given to us by Western syncretism. Dr. E.D. Burns answers this current missiological morass with well-argued, well-documented, and clear biblical persuasion. Burns provides this seasonable word in his conclusion: “The biblical gospel neither adapts nor adopts the imperfect meaning of the world’s value systems. Rather, with transcendent truth, the Bible reinterprets, reorients, and fills up what is biblically defined. . . . The transcultural Word of God provides cohesion and meaning to those cultural value systems.”

It is because Burns is a missionary who is willing to confront our doctrinal laxity and error that I am thankful to call him a friend. He is doing the church an invaluable service in calling us back to the old truths and the old paths. He wants us to pass on the doctrines we received from the apostles. I commend his work to your reading. May the Lord bless your careful reading for the sake of His name in every tribe, tongue, and nation.

*Chad Vegas
Senior Pastor, Sovereign Grace Church
Founding Board Chairman, Radius International
President, Radius Theological Institute*

Preface

This book essentially combines two shorter books that are mutually supportive and philosophically complementary. Though each section could be a standalone unit (and I was initially going to publish them separately), the book makes more sense as a whole than in two separate parts. For one to fully benefit from one section, the alternative section would necessitate equal consideration. The first section focuses on the doctrines of Scripture, sin, natural law, and culture and then goes on to discuss missiological philosophy and contextual issues. This section is essential for understanding how Christians of all cultures in all generations should approach the Word of Christ and prioritize the transcendent doctrines in Scripture.

Subsequently, the second section focuses on the historical doctrines of Christ and His gospel and then the theological implications and applications for various cultural value systems. The foundations laid in the first section support the approach and conclusions of the second. The first section is quite dense and abstracts from a variety of disciplines, while the second section is more focused in its scriptural arguments and applications. Much of the second section derives from years of discussions and lectures in the Middle East, Asia, and Africa on fear/peace, shame/honor, weakness/strength, bondage/freedom, and guilt/righteousness.

Each chapter contains various levels of heavy content. Therefore, look to the content in set-apart text boxes to quickly locate a foundational argument, main idea, or concluding point.

I've designed this book to be a resource for theologically minded practitioners and missionary-theologians to provoke constructive thinking and biblical discernment. Of its audience, this book presupposes a familiarity with theological categories, debatable ideas, and missiological trends but not necessarily an academic professionalism. It is intended to be reliable, persuasive, and well-researched for the missionary team leader on the field, the missions pastor grooming missionaries, and the missions professor training missionaries. So this book is more advanced than a popular motivational book for missions would be. Wishing to write for missionary-theologians and not in specialized jargon or in popular style for Christian living, I designed this book to be persuasive, thought-provoking, and not overly pragmatic.

As I note in the introduction, this book has an abbreviated, more practical companion volume: *The Transcultural Gospel: Jesus Is Enough for Sinners in Cultures of Shame, Fear, Bondage, and Weakness*. I recommend using that book for ministry and teaching and for applying the most important ideas of this more in-depth volume. *The Transcultural Gospel* has more applicational and devotional content, though theologically it covers the main ideas of this book. And because they both communicate the same major theological and missiological points, at times they rehearse them identically. I first developed the shorter one, then later realized a much more thorough work was necessary. For the sake of study and deeper reflection, this book extrapolates numerous ideas that deserve careful examination and inculcation in our missiological and theological endeavors. To the point: theological words have meaning, and theological ideas have eternal consequences.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful for the many friends, students, and colleagues who have encouraged me to put into book form the content of our numerous conversations about the gospel and missions. Specifically, during one class in June 2018, my students strongly encouraged me to publish my notes. Also, in discussions about upholding the centrality of penal substitutionary atonement and justification through faith alone for the sake of globally communicating the gospel, some seminary colleagues urged me to publish my thoughts. It is an honor and privilege to work with so many missionaries, theologians, and missions-minded leaders around the world who love Christ, His Word, and the glory of God among the nations.

First, I am grateful to friends and colleagues who read parts of or through all this book and provided wise feedback and theological insights: Rick Holland, Mike Abendroth, Vern Poythress, James Dolezal, Chad Vegas, Brooks Buser, Alex Kocman, Ahshuwah Hawthorne, Chris Martin, and Tanner Heath. Also, Tanner Heath and Atalie Snyder both graciously helped me put together a clean digital image of my rough hand-sketch of “The Trans-cultural Gospel Model.” I am grateful for the encouragement of my writing from John Tucker, Pradeep Tilak, Steve Cooley, Jason Duesing, Owen Strachan, Chris Morgan, Gerry Breshears, Michael Haykin, Philemon Yong, Jared Hla, Charity Mang, Brian Fairchild, Scott Callaham, Ben Orchard, George Martin, Randy

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Secondly, I thank God for my stronghearted parents, who have championed me through so much and encouraged me to stand for what's right even if it's an unpopular position. I am grateful for my sister, who brings me such joy and friendship. I praise God for my loving, godly wife, for she reminds me to contend for the truth and to endure in our missionary calling. Furthermore, my sons are gifts from the Lord, of whom I could not be prouder. Their glad-hearted admiration and devotion make serving the Lord together with them such a privilege.

Thirdly, the faculties at the seminaries where I teach have been quite supportive in my research and writing. Chuck Conniry and Jim Blumenstock are always so supportive and encouraging. I'm grateful to Mike and Lisa Sidders for lending me their cabin in Alaska so I could get away and write for a few days. Mike has been one of God's gifts to me over the years. And one of the humblest men I know, Dave Bennett, has always prayed for me and encouraged my theological and missiological leadership, for which I am indebted. I must also thank Ben Mosier for being the

friend and brother I do not deserve. Also, I am thankful to my sweet wife for kindly arranging writing leaves for me in 2019 in Thailand and in early 2020 in Alaska.

Most of all, I praise the triune God for saving me by grace alone, in Christ alone, through faith alone, to God's glory alone, revealed in Scripture alone.

E.D. Burns
Alaska
July 2020

INTRODUCTION

Ancient Truth vs. Brave New Religion

What is the difference between a Zulu gospel and an Inuit gospel? A feminist gospel and a same-sex-attracted gospel? An urban gospel and a rural gospel? A shame/honor gospel and a guilt/innocence gospel? What about preaching Christ as artist? Christ as guru? Christ as shaman? Christ as activist? Christ as revolutionary? Christ as oppressed? To some, these questions might sound a bit provocative, but fascinating, nonetheless. Or perhaps they appeal as cutting-edge missiology. Unfortunately, such questions don't automatically alarm and concern us enough. The truth is that we will lose the biblical gospel if we let cultural orientations and value systems become the primary influencers of our theology and missiology. Moreover, in seeking to reframe the biblical gospel passed down through the ages, we face the very real threat of losing the gospel altogether.

Cultural Captivity to a Brave New Religion

During the sixteenth century, German monk Martin Luther (1483–1546) stood against the authority of the Church of Rome and the pope by elevating the Word of Christ above every other authority. The Roman Catholic Church viewed itself as determi-

native over the Bible and its message, and it was Luther's rediscovery of the centrality of Christ's righteousness in the written Word that launched a gospel reformation and revival throughout Europe. This essentially threw off the shackles of Rome's control over the Word.

In a similar way, the global evangelical church of the twenty-first century has seemingly slipped into a self-made trap of heeding society's ecumenical values and multi-perspectival priorities. The motivation seems to be interpreting and applying Scripture relevantly and respectably. As Christians once languished under the theological captivity of popes and councils, so we also now struggle under the pressure of our cultural captivity. We ape the latest talking points, reimagine the gospel for cultural nuances, and relinquish theological priority and prominence to each person's unique standpoint. These are not merely neutral cultural communication techniques for contextualizing the gospel. This repackaging of the gospel based on identity, intersectionality, standpoint, and "lived experience" is the effect of a brave new religion. It blurs the transcultural distinctiveness of the faith once for all delivered to the saints.

The spirit of the age has profoundly permeated our sensibilities. This postmodern era is not one of creative liberation, but rather, it seems that the globalized culture is plunging into a post-truth dark age. It seems narrow-minded and unsophisticated to even suggest that the controlling framework of our theology and missiology should be the unchanging Word and its historical

This book argues that the centrality of a guilt/righteousness paradigm is the standard key to unlocking the gospel for the world's macro cultural value paradigms of shame/honor, fear/peace, bondage/freedom, and weakness/strength.

gospel doctrines. Instead, indicative of secular theology, we readily query prevailing social ideologies to stay relevant. And this tendency is likely no more evident than in contemporary global

missions. We desperately need a Word-centered, doctrine-driven reformation that shamelessly upholds the ancient gospel for missions. A recovering of its transcultural truths will outlast the cultural captivity of the brave new religion of this brave new world.

The Aim of This Book

The main point? We must let Scripture's own terms, categories, and doctrinal formulations prioritize our theology to guide our missiology. When we do that, we will rediscover the centrality and sufficiency of the gospel message, which the Holy Spirit has consistently illuminated from the Scriptures throughout church history.

This book argues that the centrality of a guilt/righteousness paradigm is the standard key to unlocking the gospel for the world's macro cultural value paradigms of shame/honor, fear/peace, bondage/freedom, and weakness/strength. Trust alone receives Christ Himself and His blessings secured by His righteousness and atonement. Those gospel blessings are the true substance of the patterns of God's image valued in some cultural orientations. The exchanges of Christ's righteousness and His blessings for our unrighteousness and curses depend on His substitution and imputation.

Many cultures value honor, peace, freedom, and strength. The way the world achieves them requires doing enough according to a common code. But Christian doctrine teaches that Christ's substitutionary work is enough to secure such blessings. They are benefits of the gospel that God bestows freely on the legal ground of Christ's imputed righteousness. And so, united to Christ through faith alone, we receive Christ and all that He is for us. We receive His honor, peace, freedom, and strength. And these blessings are immutable, infinite, and eternal.

The biblical gospel neither adapts nor adopts the imperfect meaning of the world's value systems. Rather, with transcen-

dent truth, the Bible reinterprets, reorients, and fills up what is biblically defined honor, peace, freedom, and strength. It brings clarity to them in the light of the lordship of Christ. The transcultural Word of God provides cohesion and meaning to those cultural value systems by showing how the benefits and blessings of Christ's work depend on the redemptive center of His work. That center includes His penal substitutionary atonement, the imputation of His righteousness, adoption into His family, reconciliation with God, and union with Him in His death and resurrection.

The curse-tainted image of God in cultural value systems esteems the true, good, and beautiful aspects of honor, peace, freedom, and strength. Learning how cultures interpret reality and prioritize value systems is important for steering people toward the gospel's solution to the original sin problem. And learning how cultures contextually interpret ideas and value systems is helpful for knowing how to disciple someone to conform their thinking to the eternal gospel.

To put it another way, those salvation doctrines that the Spirit has consistently illumined throughout church history are essential. Because of them, through faith alone, we can freely enjoy the gracious blessings of Christ's active and passive obedience. He exchanges our shame, fear, bondage, and weakness for His honor, peace, freedom, and strength. He expiates our shameful, fearmongering, enslaving, and impoverishing *guilt* for the imputation of His honorable, peace-giving, liberating, and strengthening *righteousness*.

How to Make the Best Use of This Book

Section 1: Theological Foundations.

The first section is for those interested in more technical, philosophical, theological, and historical arguments. Chapters 1–4

are much more content heavy. They lay the philosophical and theological foundations and evangelical applications of the proceeding chapters.¹

Section 2: Gospel Applications.

For those interested in more theologically integrative, missiological, and applicational content, chapters 5–9 and the conclusion provide such substance. They also include some biblical study and devotional reflection.

So if you are mainly looking for helpful ideas about communicating the biblical gospel in various cultural value systems, I would suggest moderately familiarizing yourself with chapters 1–4 and reading chapter 5 carefully. Then select any of chapters 6–9 that are most applicable to your context, though they all should be applicable to some degree. Section 1 does not necessarily need to be read first, but its rationale and implications have far-reaching effects upon the approach of Section 2.

Chapter 1 lays a theological foundation for our apologetic and missiological approach to Scripture as a divinely inspired book. Chapter 2 surveys the historical doctrine of original sin and its implications for understanding mankind’s universal problem. It discusses natural law and the abiding moral code in all people. Chapter 3 briefly considers some epistemological aberrations and

1 These chapters (1–4) employ commonly known terms such as *philosophical* and *theological* alongside lesser known, more abstract terms such as *epistemological*, *teleological*, *ontological*, and *metaphysical*. To avoid confusion and to be clear, I have included their meanings: (1) Epistemology studies the nature of knowledge, answering the question, How do we know what we know?; (2) Teleology studies the purpose of something, answering, What is the chief end of ___?; (3) Ontology studies the nature of being, answering, What is the essence of ___?; and (4) Metaphysics is the study of the nature of reality, which often includes ontology and epistemology, answering, What is the nature of ___? For a helpful resource on the history and development of Christian philosophy, see John M. Frame, *A History of Western Philosophy and Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015). See also John M. Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2015).

risks of over-contextualization, and it distinguishes the differences between cultural values and transcendent virtues and the effects of the curse on cultural value systems. Chapter 4 builds on ideas from the previous chapters (especially chapter 1). It shows how *sola Scriptura* and historical doctrine should govern our theologizing and missiology. Chapter 5 lays a foundation for why the Hebraic paradigms of guilt/righteousness and substitution and the New Testament doctrine of justification through faith alone are at the heart of the gospel—the glory of God’s grace in Christ. These doctrines are the unifying center of each cultural value system/paradigm. Chapter 6 unpacks a collectivistic orientation and shows how the gospel addresses its commonly corresponding value system of shame and honor. Chapter 7 highlights a spiritualistic orientation and explains how the gospel brings light to its cultural value system of fear and peace. Chapter 8 evaluates an individualistic orientation and demonstrates how the gospel relates to its cultural value system of bondage and freedom. Chapter 9 discusses a materialistic orientation and how the gospel penetrates its value system of weakness and strength. And the conclusion rehearses how all these value systems correspond to Christ’s redemptive work and the world’s need to rest in Christ’s merits alone. The conclusion illustrates practically how to uphold the gospel of grace and avoid the ditches of legalism and lawlessness.

This Book Is No “Silver Bullet”

To accurately establish expectations, this book offers no “silver-bullet” suggestions for contextualization or general cross-cultural communication. That would require a completely different book, and frankly, my concern here is more for what is transcendent, timeless, and faithful than for what seems most contextually strategic, dynamic, or effective. Nevertheless, this book does evaluate the weaknesses of some popular methods of contextualization and cultural accommodation. It then encour-

ages missionaries and missions-minded leaders to evaluate the theology and presuppositions behind their methodologies.

This book does not reiterate the popular works on shame/honor, fear/power, and guilt/innocence. In fact, it reshuffles the proverbial deck. It seeks to glean the best of those arguments and ground them in the classic doctrines of the gospel, specifically those recovered from the ancient church by the Reformation. This book evaluates and proposes some changes to a few of these paired systems (as indicated in the above chapter summaries). It argues that the biblical gospel is the central theme that unites all these popular paradigms and value systems.² The terms *paradigm* and *value system* convey synonymous ideas. Most missiologists call them cultural value systems, though they are more like paradigms.

Though many missiologists typically situate cultural orientations and value systems within geographies and nations (e.g., some claim shame/honor paradigms are the key for collectivistic cultures in China and Turkey, while others claim fear/power paradigms are the key for animistic cultures in Papua New Guinea and the Amazon rainforest), I have chosen to focus on the tendencies of the orientations because shades of each orientation and value paradigm exist across language groups. Some orientations are much more dominant than others. Because of the complexities of geographies, languages, economies, religions, and traditions, no single nation with all its diversity can fit exclusively into one particular orientation. And to add to the complexity, each individual within those cultures is unique and not a product of one singular paradigm.

Having evaluated some of the widely accepted value systems and paradigms, such as fear/power and guilt/innocence, I believe the biblical evidence doesn't fully support those pairs. I have

² See "The Transcultural Gospel Model" and "The Transcultural Gospel Model and Overlapping Value Systems" in the appendixes.

reframed them as fear/peace and guilt/righteousness and have prioritized guilt/righteousness as *central* to the other pairs, a place from which they all emanate. I have also coined pairs of values paradigms (e.g., bondage/freedom and weakness/strength) based on biblical evidence I perceived fit within their respective cultural orientations, which I will elaborate on and illustrate in this book.

Those paired paradigms also relate to other equally valid synonymous concepts, which I explain. I am grateful for the volumes of material on fear/power, shame/honor, and guilt/innocence, and my aim is to supplement and expand those commonly held notions into an evangelically cohesive whole.³ There could be other cultural value systems, but in terms of macro-level cultural orientations and value systems, the four offered in this book seem to represent most societies and cultures. They complement each other well, overlap quite naturally, and make sense of the big-picture gospel blessings granted to us in Christ.

By basic examination, some of these value systems might interrelate so much that they seem more similar than different. That's a fair observation. But people in each value system prioritize differently their version of the fundamental problem and their corresponding solution. And depending on their version of their original problem and its solution, they devise rules to do enough to achieve blessings.

My goal is to provide a biblical, compelling, and helpful resource for missionary-theologians to think through the lens of the gospel. My prayer is that they would witness faithfully

3 For a classic discussion of honor and shame, see Roland Muller, *Honor & Shame: Unlocking the Door* (Bloomington, IN: Xlibris, 2000), and for a well-known introduction to these cultural value paradigms, see Jayson Georges, *The 3D Gospel: Ministry in Guilt, Shame, and Fear Cultures* (Charleston, SC: Jayson Georges, 2014). See also Christian Gabre, "A Church Restored from Sin, Shame, and Fear in Tibetan Context," in *Restored to Freedom from Fear, Guilt, and Shame: Lessons from the Buddhist World*, SEANET Series 13, ed. Paul H. DeNeui (Pasadena, CA: William Carey Library, 2017), 165–87.

to people of global cultural value systems and bring them to the center of the biblical gospel—the grace of God in Christ alone.

A Companion Volume: The Transcultural Gospel

Since the following chapters require a concentrated level of engagement, a companion edition to this book condenses them in a practical way that the average missions-minded leader can use, apply, translate, and easily teach. It includes significantly more applicational features for the practitioner. As mentioned in the preface, this shorter version is *The Transcultural Gospel*.⁴ It has extra practical examples for pre-evangelism, gospel communication, and discipleship in various cultural value systems. And though this book is more polemical and academic, it employs many anecdotes and real-life examples that *The Transcultural Gospel* does not include for the sake of brevity.

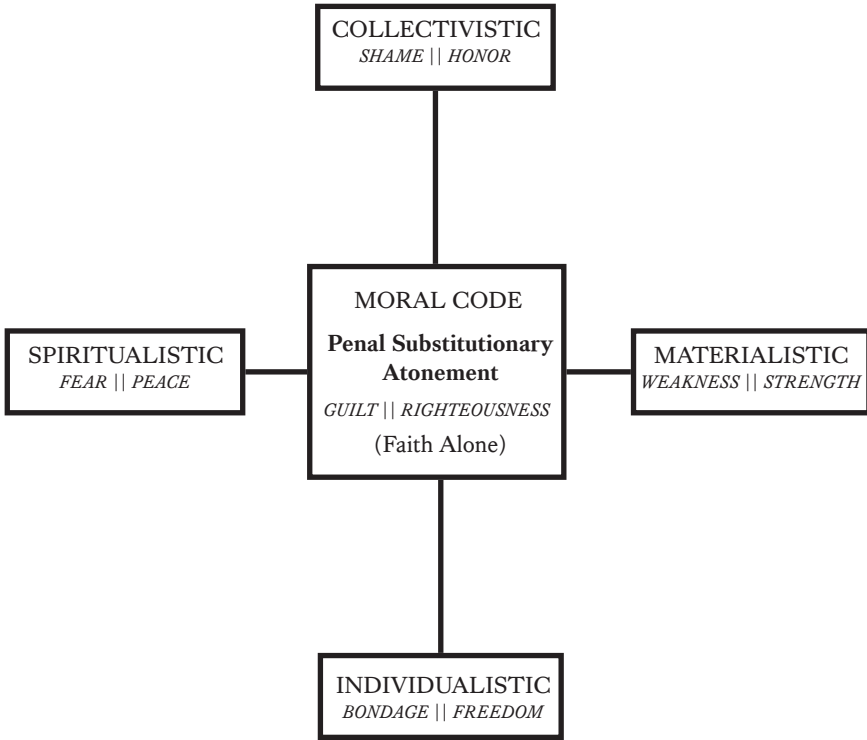
I would recommend first reading *The Transcultural Gospel* followed by *Ancient Gospel, Brave New World*.

I would recommend first reading *The Transcultural Gospel* followed by this book so you are able to understand the big picture of this book's arguments.

The Transcultural Gospel briefly summarizes ideas from this book's chapters 1–4 and then applies the main ideas from chapters 5–9. For convenience and clarity, included below is “The Transcultural Gospel Model” from the appendix:

4 E.D. Burns, *The Transcultural Gospel* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders, 2021).

THE TRANSCULTURAL GOSPEL MODEL



The Scope of This Book

This book discusses a wide range of topical issues in philosophy, theology, apologetics, and missiology, which prevents intensive analysis of every relevant verse and exacting particularity of every missiological and theological assertion. This is not a definitive academic tome. The academic reader might wonder why I didn't elaborate on more aspects of certain topics and why I highlighted some to the exclusion of others. I couldn't unpack every worthy point. And to the frustration of some specialists, I had to completely withhold many salient and pertinent issues, sources, and arguments. Unlike a singularly focused dissertation, this book is much more interdisciplinary in its orientation and is geared toward the generalist. It abstracts from a range of academic

fields and approaches. I have attempted to show how words have meanings, how theological ideas have consequences, and how interdisciplinary study can benefit both theology and missiology. Moreover, I'm consciously working against the stereotype that seminary-level debates on the mission field are ostentatious and counterproductive.

This book assumes this definition of *worldview*: "A worldview is a network of guiding assumptions about the nature of reality (i.e., metaphysics), knowledge and truth (i.e., epistemology), about what we value (i.e., value theory), and about how we should live (i.e., ethics)."⁵ Basically, the Christian worldview is what has been classically called Christian philosophy. This is a comprehensive vision of all of life under the lordship of Christ. But many sources from both Christian and non-Christian thinkers use *worldview* in a way that borrows anthropological and sociological ideas too extensive for this book's purview. It can be confusing, so instead of *worldview*, this book frequently uses the term *cultural orientation* to speak of those observable intuitive tendencies and inclinations in a culture that reflect the culture's deeply embedded vision of reality, knowledge, purpose, being, and ethics.

This book situates cultural value systems (or paradigms) below cultural orientations. Here are the cultural orientations with their connected cultural value systems:

5 Joseph E. Torres, "Worldview Thinking as a Wartime Activity," *truthXchange* (October 4, 2017), accessed June 1, 2019, <https://truthxchange.com/2017/10/worldview-thinking-wartime-activity>. James Sire's classic definition is also helpful: "A worldview is a set of presuppositions (assumptions which may be true, partially true or entirely false) which we hold (consciously or subconsciously, consistently or inconsistently) about the basic makeup of our world." James W. Sire, *Naming the Elephant: Worldview as a Concept* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2004), 19. For Sire's extended definition, see James W. Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 5th ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Academic, 2009), 20.

Orientation	Value System
Collectivistic	Shame/Honor
Spiritualistic	Fear/Peace
Individualistic	Bondage/Freedom
Materialistic	Weakness/Strength

Missiologists have published incalculable materials addressing the challenges of cross-cultural communication and gospel contextualization. It seems that a common missiological approach to gospel contextualization is to study the culture mainly to simply communicate the gospel. And by *simply*, I do not only mean *clearly* but also *basically*, *rudimentarily*, and even *minimalistically*. I will demonstrate that an alternative way forward is to be a theologian first, studying the depths and heights of the gospel. And then as a missiologist second, we should uncover how the corrupted-yet-enduring image of God in cultures and mindsets has prepared opportunities for gospel penetration. I have merely sought to explicate the gospel in a way that elicits theological reflection and draws cogent connections to major global value systems.

I will assess some popular missiological and theological trends I have broadly observed in numerous missions settings over the years. Then I seek to helpfully re-center them according to the Reformation's gospel doctrines.

Some missionaries disparage the Reformation's gospel doctrines, especially justification through faith alone, as Western *shibboleths*. The assumption is that such doctrines are myopically incongruent with contemporary scholarship and missiology. Yet my response is this: Why is there even a debate? Why the perceived boredom with the ancient faith? Why the intellectual embarrassment over the "old-fashioned" faith once for all delivered to the saints?

To be fair, as with all God's people in history, no one is immune to judicious assessment and criticism. Many thoughtful critiques

have highlighted the historical blending of the Reformers' unique cultural value systems into secondary and tertiary doctrines.⁶ I do not wish to transfer all, or even most, of the theological developments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries into the mission field of the twenty-first century. I'm an evangelical Protestant missionary who has benefited from years of rigorous academic study of global church history, from the patristics to the modern era. My intention is to argue for the centrality of the ancient gospel that the Reformers recovered and to show how transculturally relevant and timeless it is for our missions endeavors.

Two Different Kinds of Audiences: Reformational and Evangelical

There are two kinds of audiences I have in mind: first, those who cherish the Protestant Reformational doctrines. Some nondenominational evangelicals might label them as not caring much about missions, yet many brothers and sisters in the Reformational traditions truly carry a burden for evangelizing and discipling the nations. Much popular missions literature speaks a professional missiological dialect of evangelicalism, as it were. But some more doctrinally trained, denominationally rooted leaders don't easily connect with such nondenominational literature.

Second, there are those in the more professional missiological world of nondenominational evangelicalism that might skim over church history, historical theology, and the historical transmission and translation of doctrine. Such historical theology sometimes seems impractical and irrelevant. Such pragmatism typically comes from viewing historical doctrine as a cultural artifact of

6 Some rightly point out the broad variation among the Reformers in nonessential doctrines, like ecclesiology and eschatology, for instance, and then argue that they were products of their time and cultural value system. This, of course, is accurate. But the tendency, then, can be to relegate all their theological formulations, including the central gospel doctrines, into an irrelevant category of premodern German and French doctrinal artifacts—sixteenth-century cultural expressions of the gospel according to Lutherans and Calvinists.

Euro-American male scholarship. In other words, many undervalue historical doctrine because it is not missiologically useful. This aversion comes from a utilitarian perspective.

Many factors probably contribute to this, but one might be the fact that much of missions history highlights what missionaries have *achieved* over against what they have *believed*. My contention is that one of the reasons missionaries' contributions are so legendary is because they rooted themselves in the classic central doctrines of the gospel that the Reformation recovered. The doctrines of the Reformation were not merely static artifacts of the premodern European era. Rather, they revived the transcultural doctrines necessary to transmit the Christian faith cross-culturally.

The Reformation was certainly imperfect and a product of its own fallen historical milieu. But it finally liberated the true people of God from the heavy burden of the traditionally inexorable, politically entrenched, and Latin-only Roman Catholic Church.

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With the providential advent of the printing press, German, French, and English Bible translators could finally publish and broadly disseminate the Scriptures in the common language for the first

time. Just as Bible translator William Cameron Townsend (1896–1982) famously declared, “the greatest missionary is the Bible in the mother tongue.” The Reformation was a massive continental premodern missions movement. It was responsible for publishing the gospel in local languages and planting gospel-preaching churches broadly throughout Europe. And following on the heels of the Protestant Reformation, the modern missionary movement was a direct theological harvest of the seeds planted by the Reformers.

The ancient doctrines recovered in the Reformation offer truths and insights into the transcultural transmission of the gospel that non-theologically minded missiologists often overlook, to their peril. The early Reformers who translated the Bible and developed theological resources for the first time into the local languages of Europe indeed have something to teach us. They were masterful at transmitting the gospel's transcultural truths into their native languages. Though some Reformers did not explicitly highlight the Great Commission as evangelicals would today, many did, especially John Calvin.⁷ And there are transcultural and transgenerational truths in the Reformation that have profoundly inspired and sustained missionaries for five centuries. They were not merely European missionaries but also Koreans, Brazilians, Filipinos, Zambians, Burmese, Russians, and so many others.

Some, with good intentions and committed to their systems and perspectives, might find my comments off-putting and polarizing. They might perceive my Reformational theology as antiquated and even closed-minded. I don't pretend to say anything novel or groundbreaking. In the world of evangelical missions, I am arguing a minority position. I am not a moderate trying to negotiate a synthesized third way between traditional doctrine and contemporary perspectives, as though God were revealing a new thing today. Centrists lose ground. There is no nuanced middle way. Today's gospel innovators are at risk of being tomorrow's gospel defectors. Too many contemporary writings strictly aim to bless and not press, to discuss and not defend. And they sound more like a pleasant stroll in the park or a composed conversation on public radio. Rare are the books that sound like a sober-minded war room rehearsing a code of honor and employing tough principled orders.

⁷ See Lindsay Brown, *Into All the World: The Missionary Vision of Luther and Calvin* (Ross-shire, UK: Christian Focus, 2021); Michael A. G. Haykin and C. Jeffrey Robinson Sr., *To the Ends of the Earth: Calvin's Missional Vision and Legacy* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014).

For the missionary, the ancient church's gospel doctrine, as recovered by the Reformers, should be an impenetrable wall. It should separate the sheep from the wolves. The five *solas*—*sola Scriptura, sola fide, sola gratia, solus Christus, soli Deo gloria*—are the theological paradigm from which I am writing. No apologies for it. No compromise. Five *solas*, full throttle.

To be clear, I state my convictions up front about the Reformation's doctrines, not with a furrowed brow and the stereotypical scowl of a curmudgeonly theologian. But I want to plant my flag with a warmhearted evangelical admiration for God's gospel doctrines. There is so much security, joy, and peace in these doctrines, for which men of God have paid with their lives. Though I write firmly and polemically, my intent is to be straightforward and not evasive, hopeful and not cynical, helpful and not condescending. As Paul says, "We have renounced disgraceful, underhanded ways. We refuse to practice cunning or to tamper with God's word, but by the open statement of the truth we would commend ourselves to everyone's conscience in the sight of God" (2 Cor. 4:2). Paul also says, "Though we may seem to have failed . . . we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth" (13:7–8).

Definitions, Caution, and Assuming the Best

The information age poses multiple layers of opportunity and challenge for Christian ministry. Resources abound for broadcasting the gospel at lightning speed to the farthest corners of the earth. Yet, with the universal instantaneity of a provocative idea, the virtue of wise examination is rare. The Holy Spirit in Proverbs says, "If one gives an answer before he hears, it is his folly and shame. . . . The one who states his case first seems right, until the other comes and examines him" (Prov. 18:13, 17). This tendency to pounce on an idea usually manifests in one of two ways: to uncritically promote it because of social pressure or to

emotionally eviscerate an idea because some respectable influencer condemns it.

It grieves me when I discover that some idea, doctrine, or method I have proposed for years is inaccurate or misleading. I know I can always improve in my ability to communicate truthfully, graciously, and wisely. I also want to give others the benefit of the doubt that they, too, would seek to grow

I am concerned mainly with the *consequences* of ideas.

and improve when given the opportunity. Throughout this book, I primarily discuss common ideas that pervade the mission field. And much of this book seeks to address questions and concerns many of my students have had based on what they have observed in missions contexts. Many students asked me to put in book form what we have discussed in our classes over the years. Occasionally, I interact with primary sources, but I have intentionally sought to weigh in on popular theological assumptions, widespread issues, recognized missions topics, buzzword categories, and universal methods that most people don't even know from whom or where they originate.⁸ Sometimes original sources must be scrutinized, but usually extracting the idea away from a source's personality in order to neutrally dispute it seems more helpful. In most situations, especially with those who call themselves Christians, assuming the best of their intentions is prudent and can prevent much unnecessary offense and might even produce fruitful debate. We should also graciously assume that, like each of us, they might improve their approach if shown a reason for correction.

8 Of course, we cannot equally interact with all people on social media and with authors of books about most of the ideas they espouse. One thing I've noticed in the missions world is that it seems more helpful to interact with ubiquitous ideas instead of the sources of those ideas—for example, focusing on the diverse methodologies and philosophies of church-planting movements instead of Donald McGavran (1897–1990), who first pioneered church-growth movement principles.

I am aware that as readers progress through this book, my provisional statements here will likely be forgotten. But I hope that most will remember that when I am examining unbiblical and false ideas, I am concerned mainly with the *consequences* of ideas much more than those who might undiscerningly and naively endorse them.

People change and grow, but ideas are like viruses that mutate and persist long after those who spread the virus have been cured. After an idea has gained widespread popularity among missionaries through trainings, conferences, and social media, those average practitioners increasingly adopt ubiquitous ideas without pausing to examine the validity and implications of such ideas. What one influencer might propose becomes popular household missionary jargon within a few years. The source is all but forgotten, though the ideas linger on and morph into their own concoction.

Not everyone who uses typical evangelical jargon means the same thing when they use words such as *justification, mission, salvation, church, Jesus, worship, sin, lordship, faith, shame/honor, justice, kingdom, and gospel*. We must be slow to adopt terminology without examination. And with those concepts where misinterpretation might occur, we must carefully define both what we *affirm* and what we *deny*. We should expect the same of others out of respect for them and devotion to the truth. We don't want to misrepresent their meaning. And we don't want to let them wander into falsehood. In fact, it seems that many missionaries use similar vocabulary (e.g., shame/honor, church-planting, disciple-making), but we don't readily define our understanding of those common terms, and so we unfortunately talk over one another in collegial debate.

Out of love for souls and the truth, we can and must do better. Clarity is the enemy of error, and when we press for source, authority, and definition, we force truth and error to separate. Clarity comes from asking questions, like "Who told you that?"

“How do you know?” “What do you mean?” and “Why do you believe that?” Theological ideas have eternal consequences.

Final Comments

This book, just as *The Transcultural Gospel*, will have its limitations and blind spots. They are all my own. What I articulate and explain at this place in my Christian life, theological development, and missionary calling will hopefully all grow and sharpen over time. Even as I have studied and written the contents of this book over the years, I have discovered and self-corrected personal, theological, and missiological deficiencies. Instead of waiting to publish this until I have “arrived” and “got it all figured out,” I asked friends and colleagues (mentioned in the acknowledgments) to give me feedback and help me locate areas for improvement. I assume that even after publishing this, I will regret saying something the way I did or excluding something I wish I would have said. This anxiety that we can never do enough is one reason that motivated me to write this book. No matter our cultural and ethnolinguistic background and no matter our Christian service, God’s grace in Christ is enough for us. And we receive those blessings in Christ as we trust in Him alone.

May this book bring cohesion to many popular applications of communicating the gospel to people of various cultural value systems. And may it do this by contending for the message of the gospel that the Holy Spirit has made clear throughout church history. May the Word of Christ, according to its inerrancy, sufficiency, and perspicuity, for all peoples in all eras, compel the saints to submit to its doctrines with fear and trembling.

For your own soul’s sake, dare to make up your mind what you believe, and dare to have positive distinct views of truth and error. Never, never be afraid to hold decided doctrinal opinions; and let no fear of man and no morbid dread of being thought party-spirited, narrow or controversial, make

you rest contented with a bloodless, boneless, tasteless, colorless, lukewarm, undogmatic Christianity. Mark what I say. If you want to do good in these times you must throw aside indecision, and take up a distinct, sharply cut, doctrinal religion. If you believe little, those to whom you try to do good will believe nothing. The victories of Christianity, wherever they have been won, have been won by distinct doctrinal theology, by telling men roundly of Christ's vicarious death and sacrifice, by showing them Christ's substitution on the cross and His precious blood, by teaching them justification by faith and bidding them believe on a crucified Savior by preaching ruin by sin, redemption by Christ, regeneration by the Spirit, by lifting up the bronze serpent, by telling men to look and live, to believe, repent and be converted. This, this is the only teaching which for eighteen centuries God has honored with success, and is honoring at the present day both at home and abroad. . . . But, depend on it, if we want to "do good" and shake the world, we must fight with the old apostolic weapons, and stick to sound doctrine. No sound doctrine, no fruits! No positive evangelical doctrine, no evangelization!⁹

9 J. C. Ryle, *Holiness: Its Nature, Hindrances, Difficulties, and Roots* (Apollo, PA: Icthus, 2017), 328–29. These piercing words of evangelical Anglican bishop J. C. Ryle (1816–1900) underscore my deep conviction for this book.